

Call for Papers: ESPAnet Germany PhD Workshop 2025, Bremen

Diversity within and between life courses: Potentials and challenges for social policy

Social policy and its institutional consolidation in welfare states are intended to deal with social problems. Research shows that welfare states have a **standardising effect on life courses** through the definition of social problems by rewarding, enabling or sanctioning certain behaviours and by categorizing groups of people (e.g. in the definition of benefit requirements). Social change frequently poses new challenges and questions whether the solutions found with social policies are still appropriate. Over the past decades, visibility and awareness of different forms of **social diversity** have grown in European societies. Expectations of state and employer policies to consider diversity with respect to migration background, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, care responsibilities etc. are increasing, for instance through anti-discrimination measures as well as active support. One criticism towards existing welfare state configurations has long been that they are built around a **standard life course norm** including a gendered division of labour, stable full-time employment and familial care support. Not least, **welfare states reproduce inequalities**, for example in the labour market or in dividing unpaid work, although policies are often considered formally neutral. In some cases, policies openly discriminate by hierarchically sorting population groups into entitlement categories. All welfare states face challenges in deciding how much priority to put on **universal investment policies** that are assumed to help reduce later life course risks (e.g. childcare provision as an investment in children's skills and mothers' economic independence) as opposed to **policies that reduce the impact of specific adverse life events** (e.g. financial and instrumental support after divorce or separation). There are also pressing normative questions, for example regarding how **neutrality of the welfare state** should be pursued and how different interests should be considered.

Possible mismatches between policies and needs in diverse life courses pose challenges to policy making and policy analysis and critique: Which kinds of inequalities are to be addressed by the welfare state? For example, are care infrastructures and pension security linked with individual labour market participation patterns? How do social investment strategies correspond with employment histories, health and participation (in old age)? How do labour market regulations (e.g. retirement at 67) address social risks by gender and how do they account for migration history? Who campaigns for the recognition of diversity in the sphere of social policy? These questions serve as an outlook of what is to be discussed at the PhD workshop. Papers presented may also consider restricted welfare state finances, which together with increasingly diverse life courses may result in more instrumental individualised policies (e.g. providing information, advice, psychological support after parental separation) or in reducing financial support systems, because tailoring the latter may become more difficult given more diverse life situations (e.g. work-care arrangements of post-separation families).

The ESPANet Germany PhD Workshop 2025 will be hosted by **the University of Bremen on 19 and 20 February 2025**. ESPANet Germany cordially invites contributions from **doctoral researchers at any stage of their dissertation that address the links between increasing diversity and welfare states**. Comparative papers are highly welcome, as well as those taking a longitudinal perspective. Methodologically, the workshop is open to a broad range of methodological approaches and analytical perspectives. Admitted participants will be expected to **submit their workshop paper by 13 January 2025**, and give a **15-minute presentation** at the workshop. Each paper will receive individual feedback

by a senior scholar at the workshop. **Katharina Spiess** (Federal Institute for Population Research) will give a keynote lecture. **Confirmed paper discussants** include Sonja Blum, Silke Bothfeld, Frank Nullmeier, Simone Scherger, Wiebke Schulz, Olaf Groh-Samberg, Florian Blank, Katja Möhring, Pia Schober, Michaela Schulze und Hannah Zigel.

This ESPAnet Germany workshop is a joint endeavour of the working group on welfare state research of the German Political Science Association (DVPW), the Social Policy Section of the German Sociological Association (DGS) and the European Social Policy Association. It is organized by Florian Blank (WSI), Michaela Schulze (Schwerin), Katja Möhring (Bamberg), Hannah Zigel (WZB), Pia Schober (Tübingen) and Miriam Laschinski (DIFIS/Bremen) in collaboration with the German Institute for Interdisciplinary Social Policy Research (DIFIS).

Please apply with a short abstract (max. 1 page, including research question, theory, and analytical approach) to the organizing team (phd.workshop.espanet@difis.org) by 15 November 2024. The abstract should clarify how the research relates to the workshop topic. Notification on acceptance of abstracts will be sent on November 29, 2024.